

BOOK REVIEW

The Road to Balance in Asia Pacific: Geopolitics of
American Rebalancing and Chinese Belt and Road Initiative,
Dr Atia Ali Kazmi,
(Pakistan: Paramount Books (Pvt.) Ltd, 2021), 328



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The ancient Chinese philosophy of Yin-Yang does not look at different ideas or objects as opposites and mutually exclusive. Instead, it posits that they are connected at some level and contribute to each other's strength and growth in the longer scheme of things. Application of this philosophy on establishment of relations between the United States and People's Republic of China in the 1970s was the defining factor that has had far-reaching impact on the world politics, according to the author, Dr Atia Ali Kazmi. The US was then one of the poles in a bi-polar world order and China a potential great power, which had a dynamic economy in the past and could rise again. Both the states also had major stakes in the geopolitics of Asia Pacific region.

In the last fifty years, China has progressed to realize its potential. It is now a major player in global geopolitical and geo-economic spheres. The level of relations between the two world powers, the US and China, can potentially stabilize or even undermine the world order. This is the major theme presented by the author. The book is a comprehensive compendium of information on whole gamut of US-China relations, from the period when China was irrelevant for the US and Europe to the growth of relations to the level where the two states trade approximately \$657 billion worth of goods annually. Doors were opened for trade between the US and China with recognition of the latter by the US and its allies in Europe in 1970s.

With a modest beginning, the trade between them gradually grew to billions. China is now the biggest trading partner of the US. While their interests converge in trade, these diverge in the geopolitical arena and are a source of growing competition for high-stake influence in Asia Pacific. This unique coupling in the political, economic and security-military areas can create or destroy the global order.

The author discusses the dynamics of this competition in detail. Two of the longest chapters of the book cover the US re-balancing in Asia-Pacific or what is also termed Pivot to Asia policy and go on to discuss the impact of this policy on the region. These chapters also cover China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and how it is shaping geo-economics and geopolitics of Asia Pacific region. *The Road to Balance in Asia Pacific* is a treasure trove of information and excellent 360-degree analysis of China-US relations and how this relationship is influencing the security and economic growth of states in the region.

The second chapter of the book, *The Harvest of Détente*, elucidates “why” and “how” of the new imperatives of China-US relations that have been at the center stage of world politics for four decades. Although both states remain intricately connected in politico-diplomatic, economic, trade and military domains, the dynamics of shifting world affairs towards geo-economics have made them navigate through new challenges. Besides, other sources of discontent including Taiwan, Tibet, human rights, and global outreach in their bilateral relations have been reviewed. Areas of convergence, interests, and policies of the two powers have also been analyzed by the author. Both states, despite their divergent strategic interests in Asia Pacific region, would tend to avoid a military conflict, according to the author.

Chapter three examines the US policy of rebalancing the Asia Pacific region, which was considered a geostrategic priority by President Obama, while the overall rebalance strategy reflected a major shift in the US policy for the region. The evolving geopolitical environment after the US policy shift created leverage for

the US to increase its presence and influence in the Asia Pacific. The re-balancing of US geopolitical priorities and the political, military, and economic dimensions, and their impact on regional alliances and particularly on key states of Asia-Pacific have been highlighted by the writer to elaborate the pre- and post-rebalance status of US engagement in the region. In addition, it analyzes the impact of US policy of playing a greater role in regional power dynamics.

Chapter six analyses the imperatives of BRI for regional development, the extent of its success, and the growing Chinese influence in different regions. This chapter also covers challenges that BRI may have to overcome. The chapter gives the gist of analyses of American policymakers and academics regarding BRI, and its likely impact. The responses and maneuvering strategies of BRI stakeholders will inevitably shape the evolving dimensions of China-US relations.

The book's concluding chapter, *At the Crossroads*, has closely examined American rebalancing and the economic and trade-based Chinese BRI and the relevance of the two approaches to maintain balance of power in Asia Pacific region. The ripples created by the instability in the Asia Pacific region would also affect stability in other regions. The dynamics of this complex bilateral interaction have far-reaching implications. In author's view, working on strategies that are beneficial to both powers can be a better choice rather than engaging in competition and conflict.

The author believes that the American Pivot to Asia policy aiming to enhance security by maintaining American military preponderance in the Asia Pacific region and China's BRI with its emphasis on increasing trade and improving connectivity near and far are not totally at variance. Both these great powers can work together to promote their respective interests which will help in maintaining world peace and stability.

The book draws a broad picture of the contemporary interna-

tional power structure and what shape China-US relations is likely to have in the next few decades. The author also consulted and included detailed quotations from authentic sources which make the book academically rich and useful for the scholars interested in an in-depth analysis of China-US relations.

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